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ABSTRACT

This users' guide provides a structured methodology to assist public agencies in using the revised "Standards for Foster Family Services Systems" as a self-assessment tool. The first section, which deals with data sources, lists the types of written information which agencies need to apply the standards as assessment criteria and indicates the job titles of individuals who might be able to provide that information. The second section focuses on the description of data, providing a description of each named data source to assist users in finding data labeled differently by different localities and states. The third section provides some key or opening questions for each standard that users can ask as they examine the data and conduct their assessment. (JMB)

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Standards for Foster Family Services Systems

for public agencies

User's Guide

PS 011261

Prepared for

Children's Bureau
Administration for Children,
Youth, and Families

**Department of
Health, Education, and Welfare**

by the

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INTRODUCTION

Purpose

The revised standards represent the collective knowledge and judgment of many skilled and experienced individuals involved in the delivery of public foster family services, including practitioners, program administrators, and foster parents. The standards are the best available guide to what constitutes "good practice" in this child welfare service area.

The "Introduction" to the Standards lists several ways in which the Standards can be used. The User's Guide is directed toward one of those purposes: as an aid to citizen groups and agency staff who will be applying the Standards to assess the adequacy and appropriateness of their public (state or local) foster family services program. In this respect, the Guide becomes a complement to the Standards and the two should be used together.

The basic objective of the User's Guide is to provide a structured methodology for applying the Standards. Such a structured, organized approach to the task of assessment will enable advocates for effective foster family services programs to maximize the benefits of the assessment process.

Organization

The User's Guide has been organized into several sections.

- Data Sources--This section includes a concise listing of the data sources, such as written documents and titles of individuals, needed to apply each standard.

- Description of the Data--This section provides a description of each named data source. Documents which contain substantively similar information may have different names in different localities and states. For instance, what has been termed a "table of organization" in the Guide, may be called an "organizational chart" or a "staffing pattern" in a particular agency's jargon. To find the kind of data usually presented in a table of organization, users will need a clear understanding of what is being sought in addition to a "title."

- Key Questions--This section provides some key or opening questions for each standard that users can ask as they examine the data and conduct their assessment. These questions are intended to be preliminary only; this section is not an exhaustive litany but is meant to stimulate group discussion and encourage further probing into specific program areas.

The Assessment Process

The assessment group should plan on spending three to six months to conduct the assessment and to develop its report and recommendations. Some of the factors which govern the amount of time required for an assessment include the size and complexity of the agency, the accessibility of needed data, the expertise and experience of the assessment group, and the level of commitment of everyone involved in the assessment process, including the top management of the agency.

To obtain the maximum benefit from the assessment process, the group should pursue its task in a positive collaborative manner and look for agency strengths as well as weaknesses. Although agency practices and policies may not always conform to the APWA Standards, the group should keep the unique context of the agency in mind and look for substantive philosophical agreement and agency intent as well as conformance with specific provisions of the standards.

The User's Guide is a new and different approach to the provision of assistance in application of the Standards. The American Public Welfare Association hopes that readers will find it helpful.

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I. DATA SOURCES

General Information

In order to complete an assessment of an agency's foster family services program using the Standards as criteria for measurement, the assessment group will require a considerable amount of data. In many cases, though, the same data sources will be used to assess areas addressed by more than one standard.

Depending upon the agency, the written information needed may be more or less accessible, and a key assessment variable will be the kinds and quality of written data that are available. If certain information is not available in written form, the assessment group can seek out its data from individuals whose responsibilities include the substantive area of review; e.g., the agency's fiscal officer should be able to provide a clear description of the budget process if written guidelines are unavailable. Even through written materials are available, in many instances the assessment group will want to verify the accuracy or applicability of the materials by speaking with particular individuals. A list of logical contact people is included as part of this section.

Commonly understood terms have been used to identify various data sources. However, since each agency may use its own nomenclature, a brief description of the data sources has been provided in Section II--Description of the Data--to ease the process of obtaining needed information. What follows is a listing of data sources needed, by standard.

DATA SOURCES		
STANDARD	WRITTEN INFORMATION	PEOPLE TO SEE
I. Comprehensive Legal Base	. Copy of state's child welfare code/laws . Applicable regulations, e.g., licensing regulations	. Agency's legal counsel
II. Administration and Service Support System	. Table of organization . Agency policy/procedures manual . Policy memoranda . Budget preparation guidelines . Fee schedules and payment policies . Staff development . Personnel/volunteer handbook . Interagency agreements	. Agency director . Director of foster family services program . Fiscal officer . Advisory committee members . Staff representatives/union representatives . Planning staff
III. Planning and Review of the Foster Family Services System	. Table of organization . Job descriptions of planning staff . Copies of reports . Planning/review process guidelines . Monitoring plan . Management reports . System evaluation report	. Planning staff . Sample of information users

DATA SOURCES (Continued)		
STANDARD	WRITTEN INFORMATION	PEOPLE TO SEE
IV. Staff	. Table of organization . Staff need determination plan . Staffing pattern chart . Job description for key administrative and specialty staff and categories of supervisory and direct services staff . List of consultants and guidelines for consultation	. Personnel director . Agency director . Key specialty staff; several supervisors and direct service staff
V. Prevention of Separation	. Budget . CASP and other state plans which list services (IV-A, IV-B) . Staffing chart . Placement criteria and decision-making guidelines	. Direct service staff
VI. Rights of Foster Children, Their Parents, and Foster Parents	. Statement of philosophy/mission . Policy and procedures manual . Foster care reimbursement and purchasing policies . Service planning forms . Statement of client rights . Service grievance procedures . Policies and procedures for access to information . Confidentiality policies and procedures	. Director of foster family service program

VII. Service Planning and Case Review	. Table of organization . Policy and procedures manual . Automated or manual trigger system forms . Case review follow-up guidelines . Service planning forms . Staff development plan . Reports to citizens on case reviews . Pamphlets, brochures or handbooks designed for clients and foster parents	. A sample of supervisory and direct services staff . Case review unit team leader
VIII. Preplacement, Placement and Postplacement Services	. Policies and procedures manual . Service listing and description (to child and parents) . Staffing charts . Criteria for matching children and foster homes . Emergency placement policies (definition of emergency) . Emergency plans . Parent fee policies . Parent-child visitation policies . Health, psychological and psychiatric assessment guidelines . Termination agreements . Service grievance procedures	. Director of foster family services program . Supervisory/direct services staff . Foster parent association representatives . Purchase of services supervisor
IX. Purchase of Services	. Contracting procedures manual . Policies governing when to purchase services . Contract reimbursement/payment policies . Copies of sample contracts (identifying information deleted) . Monitoring policies and procedures . Monitoring forms, evaluation records	. Contracting/purchase of services supervisor . Fiscal officer . Monitoring staff

DATA SOURCES (Continued)		
STANDARD	WRITTEN INFORMATION	PEOPLE TO SEE
X. Standards Development and Licensing	. Table of organization . Licensing standards . Licensing policies and procedures . Licensing forms . Technical assistance information . Interagency agreements . Informational packets for potential licensees . Service grievance procedures	. Standards and licensing administrator . Director of foster family services program
XI. Recruitment, Selection, and Development of Foster Families	. Description of types of care available . Recruitment policies . Screening policies, procedures, and forms . Licensing standards and policies . Policy on exceptions to licensing criteria . Payment schedule . Foster parent records (identifying information deleted) . Copies of completed foster home evaluations (with identifying information deleted) . Service grievance procedures . Foster parent education materials . Public education materials . Policy on foster parents' associations . Copies of foster parents' newsletter	. Recruitment staff . Placement staff . Staff development specialist . Director of foster family services program . Representatives of foster parents' association . Licensing staff

XII. Community Development	. Annual reports . Publicity samples . Roster of meetings attended by foster family services staff	. Public information specialist . Director of foster family services program
XIII. Citizen Participation	. Table of organization . Advisory committee by-laws . Advisory committee selection criteria . Description of volunteer program . Volunteer application form . Volunteer handbook . Description of volunteer training . Description of training for staff on use of volunteers	. Volunteer coordinator . Agency director . Advisory committee members
XIV. Program Manual and Guide Materials	. Table of organization . Copy of program manual and guide materials	. Manual specialist
XV. Information Systems and Case Recording	. Case record policies . Data collection forms	. Planning staff . Agency director . Systems analyst

II. DESCRIPTION OF THE DATA

In this section, some of the terms used to identify data sources are described. Only those terms which are not self-explanatory or those which may not be familiar to individuals involved with the assessment process are included. A glossary is included as part of the Standards for Foster Family Services Systems published in a separate volume, and additional terms are defined in it.

Budget Preparation Guidelines: This material includes the fiscal guidelines within which an agency must prepare its budget. In addition, these guidelines outline the process which the agency must follow to develop estimates of needed resources, to gather documentation for specific resource requests, and to ensure that the budget is appropriately reviewed by those outside and inside the agency.

Comprehensive Annual Services Plan (CASP): A plan which the responsible state agency must publish under federal regulations for Title XX. It lists the services to be provided and the annual budget for those services, who will provide each service, and what categories of individuals will be eligible to receive each service. Similar plans mandated under Titles IV-A and IV-B are commonly called "state plans."

Code of Regulations: Regulations are operating rules which clarify the meaning of certain laws and stipulate how a law is to be put into practice. For instance, licensing regulations may specify the particular criteria which shall be used to license, although the law may only specify that all providers shall be licensed. Like statutes, regulations are customarily compiled and organized by subject matter; they are usually cross-referenced to the applicable enabling statute.

Code of Statutes: A code of statutes is a compilation of a state's current laws. Usually they are organized by chapter or section according to the subject matter. Many states publish a separate compilation which organizes all child welfare-related laws in a single book, including any criminal statutes, regulatory authorizations, definitions, and so on.

Position Descriptions: Position descriptions are descriptions of the duties of each functional job classification, e.g., "Social Worker I," "Area Director," and "Foster Care Specialist," and the qualifications that an individual must have to fill each position.

Table of Organization: A graphic representation of the horizontal and vertical relationships among components (units, divisions, etc.) and positions in an organization.

III. KEY QUESTIONS

The purpose of this section of the User's Guide is to provide readers with guidance about the kinds of information they might seek from their data sources to establish whether or not an agency is operating in conformity with the Standards. This summary of key questions is not meant to be exhaustive, but is illustrative of an approach that can facilitate the assessment process. It is APWA's intent to present questions that will generate numerous other, more specific inquiries. Each assessment group will want to tailor its inquiries to fit the particular circumstances of the agency.

To facilitate the identification of data sources, questions have generally been followed by a phrase indicating the most likely source of the answer. The questions have been organized by standard and follow the substantive sections of each standard.

I. COMPREHENSIVE LEGAL BASE

1. Are all of the applicable child welfare laws codified in one chapter of the code? (Agency legal counsel, code of statutes.)

2. Are administrative regulations codified and cross-referenced to the applicable? statutes? (Agency legal counsel, code of regulations.)

3. Are all of the key statutory provisions adequately covered in the legal base, including:

   - Designation of a responsible state agency and definition of its responsibilities
   - Designation of an operating and a licensing agency and definition of their responsibilities
   - Authority and procedure for termination of parental rights
   - Delegation of authority
   - Establishment and operation of grievance procedures
   - Authority to receive and expend funds
   - Written regulations based on statutes (Code of statutes, agency legal counsel.)

4. Do administrative regulations provide adequate operational guidance to the agency? (Code of regulations.)

II. ADMINISTRATION AND SERVICE SUPPORT SYSTEM

Organizational Structure

1. Does the table of organization clearly designate administrative responsibility for the foster family services program? (Table of organization.)

2. Are the vertical lines of authority for the foster family services program clear? (Table of organization.)

3. Is there horizontal administrative equality among the foster family services program and other service areas? (Table of organization.)

4. Are foster family services grouped appropriately with other related supportive services such as licensing and standards? (Table of organization.)

Budget

1. Is there an established needs assessment process that provides data for budget allocation decisions? (Planning staff, fiscal officer, budget preparation guidelines.)

2. Does the budget development process allow for organized participation by a variety of individuals and organizations? (Fiscal officer, advisory committee.)

3. Is there a fee schedule? If so, how is it arrived at and applied? (Fiscal officer, policy and procedures manual.)

4. Is there a systematic budget and program accountability mechanism established? (Fiscal officer.)

Personnel Practices

1. Do the written personnel policies and practices address the points identified in the standards? (Personnel policies/rules.)

2. How are these developed? (Director of personnel.)

Staff Development

1. Is there an identifiable staff development unit within the organization? (Table of organization, staff development specialist.)

2. What kinds of staff development activities are available? (Staff development plan, staff development specialist.)

Service Grievance Procedures

1. Does the agency's grievance process incorporate the policies and procedures specified by the standards? (Service grievance procedures.)

Administrative Support Services

1. Has the agency allocated all facilities and services needed by the foster family services program to carry out its function efficiently? (Director of foster family services program, foster family services staff, observation.)

Service Coordination

1. With what other agencies/organizations does the agency have formal contact and agreements? (Agency director.)

2. What formal aids to cooperation and coordination are available? How are those used? (Agency director.)

III. PLANNING AND REVIEW OF THE FOSTER FAMILY SERVICES SYSTEM

1. Is there an identifiable planning unit or staff designated to carry out the planning function? (Table of organization.)

2. Does the agency have a plan for systematic and ongoing review of all aspects of the foster family services program? Does it address all the points incorporated in the standards? (Planning staff.)

3. Does the agency have a mechanism for ensuring that planning recommendations are considered and implemented? (Agency director.)

IV. STAFF

1. Does the agency have a plan for systematic assessment of its need for staff? (Agency director.)

2. To what extent do the agency's existing position descriptions and requirements for foster family services systems staff comply with the specifications set forth in the standards? (Position descriptions.)

3. Are consultative services available as needed? What policies and procedures govern the use of consultative services? (Director of foster family services program.)

V. PREVENTION OF SEPARATION

1. Are the agency's placement criteria adequate to ensure that removal of a child is the course of last resort? (Policy and procedures manual, direct services staff.)

2. Does the agency provide a full range of preventive services as specified in the standard? (CASP; Title IV-A and IV-B state plans; budget, if allocated by programs.)

VI. RIGHTS OF FOSTER CHILDREN, THEIR PARENTS, AND FOSTER PARENTS

1. Has the agency developed statements of rights of foster children, biological parents, and foster parents? (Director of foster family services program.)

2. To the extent possible, do the agency's policies and procedures respect these rights? (Policy and procedures manual.)

VII. SERVICE PLANNING AND CASE REVIEW

1. Does the agency's philosophy or statement of mission clearly commit it to the provision of planned, time-limited services? (Statement of philosophy.)

2. Do the agency's policies and procedures clearly delineate the responsibility of staff in operationalizing the service planning process? Are the methods for accomplishing this clearly specified? For example:

   - Is there a standardized format for recording each service plan? (Policy and procedures manual.)

   - Does the agency make available to its staff the kinds of information the Standards suggest should be shared with clients and foster parents? (Direct services staff.)

   - Are there administrative controls established to assure that the specified timeframes are adhered to, e.g., initial plan within 30 days? (Director of foster family services program.)

   - Are direct service staff and supervisors provided with the kinds of training and support required to effectively carry out the service planning process? (Staff development plan, director of foster family services.)

VIII. PREPLACEMENT, PLACEMENT, AND POSTPLACEMENT SERVICES

1. Has the agency identified the three distinct aspects--preplacement, placement, and postplacement--of the service delivery process and recognized that parents, children and foster parents need services and support in each phase? (Policy and procedures manual, direct services staff.)

2. Has the agency organized its resources and staff in ways that ensure the continuity and coordination of these three service processes? (Director of foster family services program.)

3. Does the agency have clearly defined policies and criteria to determine where and how a child will be placed? (Policy and procedures manual.)

4. Does the agency have a policy to govern parent-child contact while a child is in placement? (Policy and procedures manual.)

5. Does the agency provide for all of the services recommended by the standard? If not, how has the lack of services affected the staff's ability to meet the standard? (CASP, director of foster family services program, purchase of services supervisor.)

6. Does the agency have guidelines regarding the frequency of worker contact with each foster child, parents, and foster parents? (Policy and procedures manual.)

IX. PURCHASE OF SERVICES

1. Are there written policies or guidelines that specify when services will be purchased or provided directly? (Agency director.)

2. Do sample contracts and contracting procedures include the programmatic, fiscal and administrative points covered by the standard? (Sample contracts, contracting manual.)

X. STANDARDS DEVELOPMENT AND LICENSING

1. Are the state's licensing standards compatible with nationally recognized foster family services standards? What are their strengths and deficiences? (Licensing regulations.)

2. Do the state's written policies and procedures with respect to licensing conform to the procedural recommendations of the standard? (Licensing supervisor, policies regarding licensing.)

3. Does the agency have staff with assigned responsibility for monitoring compliance with standards and enforcement of sanctions for non-compliance? (Director of foster family services program.)

4. Is there physical evidence, such as monitoring reports, which indicates that facilities are monitored as frequently as is recommended by the standard and that sanctions are applied for non-compliance? (Monitoring supervisor.)

XI. RECRUITMENT, SELECTION, AND DEVELOPMENT OF FOSTER FAMILIES

1. Does the agency provide the categories of foster care recommended by the standard? Does it have a sufficient number of foster families capable of providing each kind of care? (Policy and procedures manual, director of foster family services program.)

2. Does the agency have a recruitment program that is compatible with the requirements of this standard? (Director of public information.)

3. Does the agency have written policies and procedures to screen and study potential foster families? Are they consistent with the standard? (Licensing policies, licensing staff, home-finders.)

4. Do the state's licensing criteria consider the attributes and physical abilities of foster parents as specified in the standard? (Licensing policies, licensing staff, home-finders.)

5. What procedures exist to handle exceptions to the state's criteria for licensing? (Licensing policies, licensing staff, home-finders.)

6. What kinds of foster parent training and education are available? (Staff development specialist, representatives of foster parents' association.)

XII. COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

1. What has the agency done to encourage community education at the local level and to develop community advocacy on behalf of the agency and its clients? (Public information specialist, director of foster family system.)

XIII. CITIZEN PARTICIPATION

1. Does the agency have an advisory committee? If so, how are members selected? (Agency director.)

2. Has the advisory committee developed a strategy for enlisting the kinds of agency, community, and political support needed to implement the standards? (Advisory committee members.)

3. Does the agency have a volunteer program which operates in conformity with the standard? (Volunteer coordinator.)

XIV. MANUAL AND GUIDE MATERIALS

1. Based on the group's use of the manual materials throughout the assessment process, what limitations has the group identified in this material and how might it be strengthened?

XV. INFORMATION SYSTEMS AND CASE RECORDING

1. To what extent do the agency's current case record policies allow it to maintain and readily retrieve the kinds of information needed to accomplish its program goals? (Case record policies, planning staff, agency director.)

2. To what degree has the agency developed an automated data system to ease the manual recordkeeping and retrieval responsibilities of direct service staff? (Systems analyst, planning staff, agency director.)

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